

Sermons on Matthew

The Coming One

Matthew 11:1-6

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope
Orthodox Presbyterian Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501
(310) 212-6999
pastorpaul@integrity.com
www.branchofhope.org
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The Coming One

Matthew 11:1-6

Now it came to pass, when Jesus finished commanding His twelve disciples, that He departed from there to teach and to preach in their cities.² And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples³ and said to Him, “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?”⁴ Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: ⁵ *The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them.* ⁶ And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.” (Matthew 11:1-6)

Teaching and Preaching

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(Matthew 11:1)

Jesus did not engage in passive delegation. In chapter ten, He issued the marching orders for His disciples. This was not done to supplant the labors of His own hands. There would be no respite for Christ. He would continue to teach and to preach.

He would teach and preach. It is an error to think that there weren't other, more entertaining, forms of communication available at the time of Christ. There were musicals and dramas in abundance. Would that not be more winsome than the lengthy discourse? That the Lord Himself chose to verbally teach and preach (this is mentioned numerous times by Matthew) should inform Christians and their pastors that this is God's glorious means of grace in our lives and shouldn't be neglected.

Clearing up some confusion between preaching and teaching seems appropriate. I often hear a false distinction, as if teaching is conveying the dry details and preaching is motivational speaking. From a Christian perspective, teaching (*διδάσκειν*) is instruction regarding the truths contained in the word of God. Preaching (*κηρύσσειν*) is more akin to a proclamation and how what has just been

taught has a claim on our lives. One might think of the sheriff unraveling the scroll and announcing the king's new law. A teacher tells me what it means; the sheriff informs me that it pertains to me.

John's Query

And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples ³ and said to Him, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" (Matthew 11: 2, 3)

Isn't this interesting? Hadn't John (the Baptist) already proclaimed Jesus the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29)? Had his faith faltered?

The Coming One

John was in prison for his public denouncement of Herod's unlawful marriage (Matthew 14:3–11—I guess public leaders are subject to moral scrutiny). He would soon be beheaded. And now he is sending his followers to ask Jesus if He is The Coming One. From the fall of man, God's promise of a Savior permeated the Scriptures (Genesis 3:15; 49:10; Numbers 24:17; Deuteronomy 18:15; Daniel 9:24; Isaiah 53 and tons of others). A fairly descriptive term like "*The Coming One*" would be easily understood as the Christ.

A Conundrum

Since we're not told what was actually happening in John's psyche that would occasion this question, I can only offer some 'perhaps.' First, perhaps prison had so shaken John that he was questioning his faith. This is unlikely on a couple of counts: one, Jesus' testimony of John later in this chapter, and two, the fact that he was seeking an answer from Jesus Himself. If he doubted Jesus, why solve the problem by asking Jesus?

Secondly, perhaps John had misunderstood the nature of the deliverance promised by the Messiah. Premillennialists might argue that John had Second Coming expectations from the First Coming of Christ—a Second Coming Jesus

would probably get John out of prison¹. It's always amusing when theologians think they understand theology better than John or Peter or Paul. Not to mention that that correction is not made by Jesus in His response, i.e. Jesus doesn't say, "John, you apparently don't understand what I came to do."

Perhaps John sent his followers to ask Jesus these questions for their own benefit. Matthew 9:14 reveals that, at least some level, John's followers were buddying up with the Pharisees more than with the disciples of Jesus. Perhaps John would counter this by sending his followers directly to the Master with a question that would be answered with a dynamic punctuation—Luke's record of this event reveals that Jesus performed signs and wonders before their eyes between their question and His answer (Luke 7:18-23). This seems the most likely answer, but it is still a 'perhaps'.

Tell What You See, Hear

Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: ⁵ *The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them.*" (Matthew 11:4, 5)

Jesus doesn't merely answer the question; He shows them, and then tells them to tell John what they saw. Of course if they knew not the Scriptures, they wouldn't know that He was citing these miracles as a confirmation of who He was. The Coming One would do those things that Jesus did (Isaiah 29:18; 35:4-16; 66:1).

Why Miracles?

It's worth reviewing here the reasons for miracles: In the present context we learn that Jesus' miracles revealed who He was. So miracles were a sign that Jesus was the Coming One. Miracles also revealed that the one performing the miracle was a prophet of God (Matthew 9:6; Acts 14:3; Hebrews 2:4). The miracles performed by Jesus and His apostles also revealed the nature of God's covenant promise.

¹ Amillennialists might have the same argument...that John had physical/political expectations from a spiritual messiah.

Taking Our Infirmities

Matthew had recorded that many demon-possessed and sick people were brought to Jesus, and He healed them; then he informs the reader that this (all the healings) was a fulfillment of the prophecy recorded in Isaiah 53, **“He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses.”** (Matthew 8:17; cf. Isaiah 53:4)

Although sickness is mentioned, a reading of Isaiah 53 reveals that sickness is mentioned to illustrate the genesis of all sickness, sin. Isaiah 53 brings this to a head in its last verse which reads, **“And He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”** (Isaiah 53:12b)

Let us not miss the point Matthew—Jesus is making. Healings were a sign of who Jesus is, a confirmation of what Jesus said, and an object lesson of His love for His people and power over sin and death. If He can heal, He can save. Jesus conquers all that sickness and poverty represents—all the pain, sorrow, suffering and death.

Miracles—Not the Norm

Although we should trust that God can heal and restore, and we should pray along these lines, we should not think that the types of supernatural, authoritative healings that were performed by Jesus and His apostles are the norm for history.

This type of teaching and expectation becomes pernicious and manipulative. Modern day apostles have their followers careening through the chasms of apocryphal piety, anxiously awaiting the divine payoff. More times than not, all that awaits them is disappointment and discouragement.

It is a mistake to read the Bible in such a way as to think that Jesus is going to heal everyone with faith throughout history, or earthquake all the prisons open as He did for Paul and Silas (Acts 16:26). This is not the norm for history. It wasn't even the norm then. Look at the text! John is still in prison. And he wasn't getting out. There was a greater deliverance that John had in mind, an eternal deliverance. **“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”** was John's song. (John 1:29; cf. 1:36) Perhaps John knew what Paul learned when he prayed for deliverance from affliction.

Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. ⁹ And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:8, 9a)

The polestar of Christ's ministry—the core of God's covenant of grace—is not medical, social, political, or economic (even though I think it will have a profound affect upon all this); it is salvific. It is not that we can somehow escape sorrow and death; that's not gonna happen, friend. It is that we can escape the second death (Revelation 2:11; 20:6; 21:8).

Christianity is for those who by grace confess with David, that “there is no soundness in our flesh...nor health in our bones because of our sin...our iniquity has gone over our heads like a heavy burden too heavy for us.” (cf. Psalm 38:3, 4)

We therefore look to the One who came to “bear our griefs...carry our sorrows...be smitten and afflicted by God and wounded for our transgressions.” He would receive “the chastisement for our peace...and the Lord has laid upon Him the iniquity of us all (cf. Isaiah 53:4-6).

And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.” (Matthew 11:6)

In light of the glorious promises granted to those who trust in the Coming One, how indisputable are these words! How full of fortune is the one who is not offended (*skandalizo*) because of Jesus.

As amazing as it may sound, the true Jesus can be a stumbling block to religion. We must work hard at presenting the Jesus of the Scriptures and not the Jesus who comports with our own sacrosanct clingy world view.

In this somewhat wordy, hard to translate sentence, Jesus has already observed and anticipates that He is a stumbling block and a rock of offense to a brand (any brand) of religion where men place even the smallest amount of trust in their own dust-ridden lives to be justified before God (1 Peter 2:8).

How blessed is the man who when confronted with Jesus does not despise God and turn his back on the wonderful blessings God has promised the faithful. How blessed is the man who has the wisdom to discern the lies, and the eyes to see the Truth. This is not an easy task. It is a task which wars against our natures. It is a task utterly dependent upon the beneficence of God. And this beneficence produces Christians who praise God from their prison cells.

Questions for Study

1. Why should teaching and preaching be primary in ministry (page 2)?
2. What is the difference between teaching and preaching (page 2)?
3. What did John mean by the Coming One (page 3)?
4. Why would John ask if they should look for another (pages 3, 4)?
5. How did Jesus answer John's question (page 4)?
6. What was the purpose of miracles (pages 4, 5)?
7. What is central in Christianity (pages 5, 6)?
8. What does it mean to "not be offended" because of Jesus (page 6)?